

## Graeme Charles on Co-operation in The Devondaler



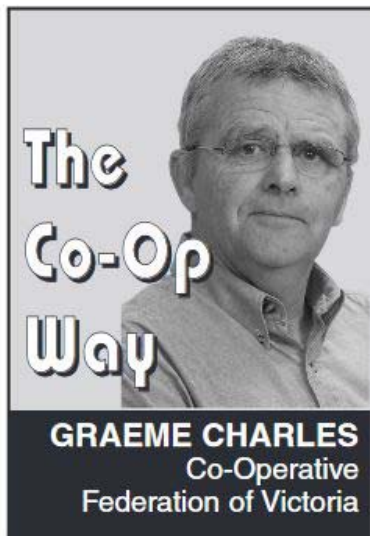
Graeme Charles was the Executive Officer and Secretary of the Co-operative Federation of Victoria Ltd between 1999 and 2002 and Deputy Chairman between 2002 and 2008 – the peak body for co-operatives in the Australian State of Victoria.

Between 2006 and 2008 Graeme Charles was a guest columnist for The Devondaler – the monthly newspaper of Murray Goulburn Co-operative Co. Limited. The Devondaler was established in 1986.

The Co-operative is one of Australia's largest with 2200 dairy farmer members and more than 2000 employees.

Twenty of these columns have been reproduced.

## The importance of co-operatives to agriculture across the world



The most successful type of co-operative, measured by market share, is the agricultural co-operative.

In Denmark, marketing, processing, supply and credit co-operatives have realised their full potential. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century **all** the needs of rural communities were being met by co-operatives.

The USA has the largest agricultural co-operative sector. In 1994 four million farmers were members of co-operatives. Co-operatively owned businesses such as Land O'Lakes, Sunkist and Ocean Spray are considered major players in rural America.

In Canada, co-operatives handle 40% of farm cash receipts. They are export led and heavily involved in

value-adding through food processing.

In the Americas, Brazil comes next with a co-operative output almost the same as that of Canada.

90% of Japanese farmers are members of co-operatives, and they provide an integrated system of marketing, supply, credit and insurance for the entire rural economy. Its co-operative Central Bank is one of the largest banks, and the insurance arm is the largest insurance company in Japan. These are among the biggest businesses in the world.

If we look more specifically at milk distribution, everywhere the co-operative market share is high. France 50%, Slovenia 70%, Belgium 80%, the Netherlands 75%, the United Kingdom %, and Norway practically 100%.

So co-operatives continue to fulfil a very important role in agriculture world-wide, and the fact that this is no longer the case in Australia should be a cause of concern to all Australian farmers. Rather than continuing to disappear from the rural landscape, the opposite should be happening. Farmers have always been disadvantaged in the market place and only co-operative structures provide them with a means of retaining control and ownership beyond the farm gate.

2 October 2006



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